

Washington, D.C. - In response to strong concerns expressed yesterday by Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) and others, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) today informed the congressman that it's reversing its proposal to cut the number of screening personnel for Stewart International Airport and will instead increase the number of screeners. Hinchey argued in a letter sent yesterday to Chertoff that the proposed cuts were being made based on past data on the use of the airport and failed to take into account the fact that many more flights will be operating out of Stewart Airport with new Jet Blue and AirTran Airways service.

"I am very pleased that the TSA quickly reversed its plan to cut security screeners at Stewart Airport and instead will bump up the number of security officials at the airport," Hinchey said. "As Stewart Airport continues to grow, it is important that we stay on top of local, state, and federal agencies to implement policies that will facilitate that growth. Increasing instead of decreasing the number of screeners is a very positive first step and we are definitely in a much better situation than we were 24 hours ago. However, I will be pressing TSA to add at least another 15 screeners to adequately meet the increasing number of passengers who will be using Stewart."

TSA recently told Stewart Airport officials that the level of federal screeners, which is currently at 30 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs), would be reduced to 25 FTE's for Fiscal Year 2007 as a result of a decrease in air passengers who used the airport in 2006. However, TSA announced today that the number of FTEs would instead climb to 35. While the reversal is welcome news, Hinchey will continue to push the argument he made in his letter to Chertoff yesterday -- that Stewart Airport officials told him that based on conversations they had with local TSA officials they need at least 50 FTEs to sufficiently meet the demand of increased passengers at the airport. The number of passengers expected to use Stewart Airport in 2007 could more than double from the 2006 level to as high as 375,000 as a result of new JetBlue and AirTran service. Additionally, the airport continues to aggressively recruit additional airlines, which would further increase the number of passengers.